Mahatma Gandhi's Life and Freedom Struggle

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Abstract

This paper mainly concentrates on Mahatma Gandhi's Life and Freedom Struggle. Mahatma Gandhi came to be known as Mahatma (great soul) for the courageous, selfless, and nonviolent methodologies that characterized the way Mahatma Gandhi lived as well as his attempts at instilling reform for the betterment of his fellow citizens and the world. In this chapter we look at the wisdom that can be gleaned from an individual who was neither simple to understand, nor a stranger to error or to defeat, but who continues to inspire many and interest many more. We attempt to describe the path to learning proposed by this man who was also an exceedingly shrewd tactician and strategist. Mahatma Gandhi taught us that an individual can train himself or herself to become transparent and open and also create synergy and cooperation between education, training, employment, and the community, striving always for continuous improvement. Gandhi was a performance manager for the country and a supremely practical leader for change. Mahatma Gandhi believed that truth, tolerance, sacrifice, joy, and the nonviolent rejection of tyranny were the very substance of a successful life. Gandhi's ways of organizing people, of examining and producing ideas for bringing people together, are important lessons for reducing the present tensions created by global trade, commerce, and information technologies. Gandhi measured all decisions against truth. Truth can be translated as transparency in thought, word, and action and the courage to see limitations and possibilities against the raw material of aptitude and skill available in a person. In the light of Gandhian ideas about work, effort, and the dignity of labor, we examine the phenomenon of career in the contemporary context. Career counseling is about understanding ground realities and

possibilities. Gandhi spoke about means and ends. According to him, the means of arriving at an end must be as honorable as the end. In this context this paper represents all the Life and Freedom Struggle of freedom struggle in this view.

Key words: Mahatma Gandhi's Life, Freedom Struggle

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi came to be known as Mahatma (great soul) for the courageous, selfless, and nonviolent methodologies that characterized the way Mahatma Gandhi lived as well as his attempts at instilling reform for the betterment of his fellow citizens and the world. Aroused by the massacre of Amritsar in 1919, Gandhi devoted his life to gaining India's independence from Great Britain. As the dominant figure used his persuasive philosophy of non-violent confrontation, he inspired political activists with many persuasions throughout the world (Andrews 23). Not only was Mahatma Gandhi a great peacemaker, but also his work to achieve freedom and equality for all people was greatly acknowledged. Gandhi's unconventional style of leadership gained him the love of a country and eventually enabled him to lead the independence movement in India. Mohandas Gandhi, later called Mahatma Gandhi, was born on October 2,1869 in Porbandar, which is the present day state of Gujarat, India.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 into an Indian Gujarati Hindu Modh Baniya family in Porbandar (also known as Sudamapuri), a coastal town on the Kathiawar Peninsula and then part of the small princely state of Porbandar in the Kathiawar Agency of the Indian Empire. His father, Karamchand Uttamchand Gandhi (1822–1885), served as the diwan (chief minister) of Porbandar state. Although he only had an elementary education and had previously been a clerk in the state administration, Karamchand proved a capable chief minister. During his tenure, Karamchand married four times. His first two wives died young, after each had given birth to a daughter, and his third marriage was childless. In 1857, Karamchand sought his third wife's permission to remarry; that year, he married Putlibai (1844–1891), who also came from Junagadh, and was from a Pranami Vaishnava family. Karamchand and Putlibai had three children over the ensuing decade: a son, Laxmidas (c. 1860–1914); a daughter, Raliatbehn (1862–1960); and another son, Karsandas (c. 1866–1913). On 2 October 1869, Putlibai gave birth to her last child, Mohandas, in a dark, windowless ground-floor room of the Gandhi family residence in Porbandar city. As a child, Gandhi was described by his sister Raliat as "restless as mercury, either playing or

roaming about. One of his favourite pastimes was twisting dogs' ears." The Indian classics, especially the stories of Shravana and king Harishchandra, had a great impact on Gandhi in his childhood. In his autobiography, he admits that they left an indelible impression on his mind. He writes: "It haunted me and I must have acted Harishchandra to myself times without number." Gandhi's early self-identification with truth and love as supreme values is traceable to these epic characters. The family's religious background was eclectic. Gandhi's father Karamchand was Hindu and his mother Putlibai was from a Pranami Vaishnava Hindu family. Gandhi's father was of Modh Baniya caste in the varna of Vaishya. His mother came from the medieval Krishna bhakti-based Pranami tradition, whose religious texts include the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavata Purana, and a collection of 14 texts with teachings that the tradition believes to include the essence of the Vedas, the Quran and the Bible. Gandhi was deeply influenced by his mother, an extremely pious lady who "would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers... she would take the hardest vows and keep them without flinching. To keep two or three consecutive fasts was nothing to her." In 1874, Gandhi's father Karamchand left Porbandar for the smaller state of Rajkot, where he became a counsellor to its ruler, the Thakur Sahib; though Rajkot was a less prestigious state than Porbandar, the British regional political agency was located there, which gave the state's diwan a measure of security. In 1876, Karamchand became diwan of Rajkot and was succeeded as diwan of Porbandar by his brother Tulsidas. His family then rejoined him in Rajkot.

Struggle for Indian independence (1915–1947)

At the request of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, conveyed to him by C. F. Andrews, Gandhi returned to India in 1915. He brought an international reputation as a leading Indian nationalist, theorist and community organiser. Gandhi joined the Indian National Congress and was introduced to Indian issues, politics and the Indian people primarily by Gokhale. Gokhale was a key leader of the Congress Party best known for his restraint and moderation, and his insistence on working inside the system. Gandhi took Gokhale's liberal approach based on British Whiggish traditions and transformed it to make it look Indian. Gandhi took leadership of the Congress in 1920 and began escalating demands until on 26 January 1930 the Indian National Congress declared the independence of India. The British did not recognise the declaration but negotiations ensued, with the Congress taking a role in provincial government in the late 1930s. Gandhi and the Congress withdrew their support of the Raj when the Viceroy declared war on

Germany in September 1939 without consultation. Tensions escalated until Gandhi demanded immediate independence in 1942 and the British responded by imprisoning him and tens of thousands of Congress leaders. Meanwhile, the Muslim League did co-operate with Britain and moved, against Gandhi's strong opposition, to demands for a totally separate Muslim state of Pakistan. In August 1947 the British partitioned the land with India and Pakistan each achieving independence on terms that Gandhi disapproved.

The role of India in World War I

In April 1918, during the latter part of World War I, the Viceroy invited Gandhi to a War Conference in Delhi. Gandhi agreed to actively recruit Indians for the war effort. In contrast to the Zulu War of 1906 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when he recruited volunteers for the Ambulance Corps, this time Gandhi attempted to recruit combatants. In a June 1918 leaflet entitled "Appeal for Enlistment", Gandhi wrote "To bring about such a state of things we should have the ability to defend ourselves, that is, the ability to bear arms and to use them... If we want to learn the use of arms with the greatest possible despatch, it is our duty to enlist ourselves in the army." He did, however, stipulate in a letter to the Viceroy's private secretary that he "personally will not kill or injure anybody, friend or foe." Gandhi's war recruitment campaign brought into question his consistency on nonviolence. Gandhi's private secretary noted that "The question of the consistency between his creed of 'Ahimsa' (nonviolence) and his recruiting campaign was raised not only then but has been discussed ever since."

Champaran Satyagraha

Gandhi's first major achievement came in 1917 with the Champaran agitation in Bihar. The Champaran agitation pitted the local peasantry against their largely British landlords who were backed by the local administration. The peasantry was forced to grow Indigofera, a cash crop for Indigo dye whose demand had been declining over two decades, and were forced to sell their crops to the planters at a fixed price. Unhappy with this, the peasantry appealed to Gandhi at his ashram in Ahmedabad. Pursuing a strategy of nonviolent protest, Gandhi took the administration by surprise and won concessions from the authorities.

Kheda Satyagraha

In 1918, Kheda was hit by floods and famine and the peasantry was demanding relief from taxes. Gandhi moved his headquarters to Nadiad, organising scores of supporters and fresh

volunteers from the region, the most notable being Vallabhbhai Patel.[100] Using non-co-operation as a technique, Gandhi initiated a signature campaign where peasants pledged non-payment of revenue even under the threat of confiscation of land. A social boycott of mamlatdars and talatdars (revenue officials within the district) accompanied the agitation. Gandhi worked hard to win public support for the agitation across the country. For five months, the administration refused but finally in end-May 1918, the Government gave way on important provisions and relaxed the conditions of payment of revenue tax until the famine ended. In Kheda, Vallabhbhai Patel represented the farmers in negotiations with the British, who suspended revenue collection and released all the prisoners.

Khilafat movement:

In 1919 after the World War I was over, Gandhi (aged 49) sought political co-operation from Muslims in his fight against British imperialism by supporting the Ottoman Empire that had been defeated in the World War. Before this initiative of Gandhi, communal disputes and religious riots between Hindus and Muslims were common in British India, such as the riots of 1917–18. Gandhi had already supported the British crown with resources and by recruiting Indian soldiers to fight the war in Europe on the British side. This effort of Gandhi was in part motivated by the British promise to reciprocate the help with swaraj (self-government) to Indians after the end of World War I. The British government, instead of self government, had offered minor reforms instead, disappointing Gandhi. Gandhi announced his satyagraha (civil disobedience) intentions. The British colonial officials made their counter move by passing the Rowlatt Act, to block Gandhi's movement. The Act allowed the British government to treat civil disobedience participants as criminals and gave it the legal basis to arrest anyone for "preventive indefinite detention, incarceration without judicial review or any need for a trial".

Gandhi felt that Hindu-Muslim co-operation was necessary for political progress against the British. He leveraged the Khilafat movement, wherein Sunni Muslims in India, their leaders such as the sultans of princely states in India and Ali brothers championed the Turkish Caliph as a solidarity symbol of Sunni Islamic community (ummah). They saw the Caliph as their means to support Islam and the Islamic law after the defeat of Ottoman Empire in World War I. Gandhi's support to the Khilafat movement led to mixed results. It initially led to a strong Muslim support for Gandhi. However, the Hindu leaders including Rabindranath Tagore questioned Gandhi's leadership because they were largely against recognising or supporting the Sunni Islamic Caliph in Turkey.

The increasing Muslim support for Gandhi, after he championed the Caliph's cause, temporarily stopped the Hindu-Muslim communal violence. It offered evidence of inter-communal harmony in joint Rowlatt satyagraha demonstration rallies, raising Gandhi's stature as the political leader to the British. His support for the Khilafat movement also helped him sideline Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who had announced his opposition to the satyagraha non-cooperation movement approach of Gandhi. Jinnah began creating his independent support, and later went on to lead the demand for West and East Pakistan.

Non-co-operation movement

With his book Hind Swaraj (1909) Gandhi, aged 40, declared that British rule was established in India with the co-operation of Indians and had survived only because of this co-operation. If Indians refused to co-operate, British rule would collapse and swaraj would come. Gandhi with Dr. Annie Besant en route to a meeting in Madras in September 1921. Earlier, in Madurai, on 21 September 1921, Gandhi had adopted the loin-cloth for the first time as a symbol of his identification with India's poor.

In February 1919, Gandhi cautioned the Viceroy of India with a cable communication that if the British were to pass the Rowlatt Act, he would appeal to Indians to start civil disobedience. The British government ignored him and passed the law, stating it would not yield to threats. The satyagraha civil disobedience followed, with people assembling to protest the Rowlatt Act. On 30 March 1919, British law officers opened fire on an assembly of unarmed people, peacefully gathered, participating in satyagraha in Delhi. People rioted in retaliation. On 6 April 1919, a Hindu festival day, he asked a crowd to remember not to injure or kill British people, but to express their frustration with peace, to boycott British goods and burn any British clothing they owned. He emphasised the use of non-violence to the British and towards each other, even if the other side uses violence. Communities across India announced plans to gather in greater numbers to protest. Government warned him to not enter Delhi. Gandhi defied the order. On 9 April, Gandhi was arrested. People rioted. On 13 April 1919, people including women with children gathered in an Amritsar park, and a British officer named Reginald Dyer surrounded them and ordered his troops to fire on them. The resulting Jallianwala Bagh massacre (or Amritsar massacre) of hundreds of Sikh and Hindu civilians enraged the subcontinent, but was cheered by some Britons and parts of the British media as an appropriate response. Gandhi in Ahmedabad, on the day after the massacre in Amritsar, did not criticise the British and instead criticised his fellow countrymen for not

exclusively using love to deal with the hate of the British government.[119] Gandhi demanded that people stop all violence, stop all property destruction, and went on fast-to-death to pressure Indians to stop their rioting. The massacre and Gandhi's non-violent response to it moved many, but also made some Sikhs and Hindus upset that Dyer was getting away with murder. Investigation committees were formed by the British, which Gandhi asked Indians to boycott. The unfolding events, the massacre and the British response, led Gandhi to the belief that Indians will never get a fair equal treatment under British rulers, and he shifted his attention to Swaraj or self rule and political independence for India. In 1921, Gandhi was the leader of the Indian National Congress. He reorganised the Congress. With Congress now behind him, and Muslim support triggered by his backing the Khilafat movement to restore the Caliph in Turkey, Gandhi had the political support and the attention of the British Raj.

Gandhi spinning yarn, in the late 1920s

Gandhi expanded his nonviolent non-co-operation platform to include the swadeshi policy – the boycott of foreign-made goods, especially British goods. Linked to this was his advocacy that khadi (homespun cloth) be worn by all Indians instead of British-made textiles. Gandhi exhorted Indian men and women, rich or poor, to spend time each day spinning khadi in support of the independence movement. In addition to boycotting British products, Gandhi urged the people to boycott British institutions and law courts, to resign from government employment, and to forsake British titles and honours. Gandhi thus began his journey aimed at crippling the British India government economically, politically and administratively. The appeal of "Non-cooperation" grew, its social popularity drew participation from all strata of Indian society. Gandhi was arrested on 10 March 1922, tried for sedition, and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. He began his sentence on 18 March 1922. With Gandhi isolated in prison, the Indian National Congress split into two factions, one led by Chitta Ranjan Das and Motilal Nehru favouring party participation in the legislatures, and the other led by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, opposing this move. Furthermore, co-operation among Hindus and Muslims ended as Khilafat movement collapsed with the rise of Ataturk in Turkey. Muslim leaders left the Congress and began forming Muslim organisations. The political base behind Gandhi had broken into factions. Gandhi was released in February 1924 for an appendicitis operation, having served only two years.

Salt Satyagraha (Salt March)

Original footage of Gandhi and his followers marching to Dandi in the Salt Satyagraha: After his early release from prison for political crimes in 1924, over the second half of the 1920s, Gandhi continued to pursue swaraj. He pushed through a resolution at the Calcutta Congress in December 1928 calling on the British government to grant India dominion status or face a new campaign of non-co-operation with complete independence for the country as its goal. The British did not respond favourably to Gandhi's proposal. British political leaders such as Lord Birkenhead and Winston Churchill announced opposition to "the appeasers of Gandhi", in their discussions with European diplomats who sympathised with Indian demands. On 31 December 1929, the flag of India was unfurled in Lahore. Gandhi led Congress celebrated 26 January 1930 as India's Independence Day in Lahore. This day was commemorated by almost every other Indian organisation. Gandhi then launched a new Satyagraha against the tax on salt in March 1930. Gandhi sent an ultimatum in the form of a polite letter to the viceroy of India, Lord Irwin, on 2 March. Gandhi condemned British rule in the letter, describing it as "a curse" that "has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration... It has reduced us politically to serfdom." Gandhi also mentioned in the letter that the viceroy received a salary "over five thousand times India's average income." British violence, Gandhi promised, was going to be defeated by Indian non-violence. According to Atlury Murali, Indian Congress in the 1920s appealed to Andhra Pradesh peasants by creating Telugu language plays that combined Indian mythology and legends, linked them to Gandhi's ideas, and portrayed Gandhi as a messiah, a reincarnation of ancient and medieval Indian nationalist leaders and saints. The plays built support among peasants steeped in traditional Hindu culture, according to Murali, and this effort made Gandhi a folk hero in Telugu speaking villages, a sacred messiah-like figure. Gandhi also campaigned hard going from one rural corner of the Indian subcontinent to another. He used terminology and phrases such as Rama-rajya from Ramayana, Prahlada as a paradigmatic icon, and such cultural symbols as another facet of swaraj and satyagraha.[138] These ideas sounded strange outside India, during his lifetime, but they readily and deeply resonated with the culture and historic values of his people.

Negotiations

The government, represented by Lord Irwin, decided to negotiate with Gandhi. The Gandhi–Irwin Pact was signed in March 1931. The British Government agreed to free all political prisoners, in return for the suspension of the civil disobedience movement. According to the pact, Gandhi was invited to attend the Round Table Conference in London for discussions and as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. The conference was a disappointment to Gandhi and the nationalists. Gandhi expected to discuss India's independence, while the British side focused on the Indian princes and Indian minorities rather than on a transfer of power. Lord Irwin's successor, Lord Willingdon, took a hard line against India as an independent nation, began a new campaign of controlling and subduing the nationalist movement. Gandhi was again arrested, and the government tried and failed to negate his influence by completely isolating him from his followers.

Round Table Conferences

Mahadev Desai (left) was Gandhi's personal assistant, both at Birla House, Bombay, 7 April 1939 During the discussions between Gandhi and the British government over 1931–32 at the Round Table Conferences, Gandhi, now aged about 62, sought constitutional reforms as a preparation to the end of colonial British rule, and begin the self-rule by Indians. The British side sought reforms that would keep Indian subcontinent as a colony. The British negotiators proposed constitutional reforms on a British Dominion model that established separate electorates based on religious and social divisions. The British questioned the Congress party and Gandhi's authority to speak for all of India. They invited Indian religious leaders, such as Muslims and Sikhs, to press their demands along religious lines, as well as B. R. Ambedkar as the representative leader of the untouchables. Gandhi vehemently opposed a constitution that enshrined rights or representations based on communal divisions, because he feared that it would not bring people together but divide them, perpetuate their status and divert the attention from India's struggle to end the colonial rule. The Second Round Table conference was the only time he left India between 1914 and his death in 1948. He declined the government's offer of accommodation in an expensive West End hotel, preferring to stay in the East End, to live among working-class people, as he did in India. He based himself in a small cell-bedroom at Kingsley Hall for the three-month duration of his stay and was enthusiastically received by East Enders. During this time he renewed his links with the British vegetarian movement.

World War II and Quit India movement

Gandhi opposed providing any help to the British war effort and he campaigned against any Indian participation in the World War II. Gandhi's campaign did not enjoy the support of Indian masses and many Indian leaders such as Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad. His campaign was a failure. Over 2.5 million Indians ignored Gandhi, volunteered and joined the British military to fight on various fronts of the allied forces. Gandhi opposition to the Indian participation in the World War II was motivated by his belief that India could not be party to a war ostensibly being fought for democratic freedom while that freedom was denied to India itself. He also condemned Nazism and Fascism, a view which won endorsement of other Indian leaders. As the war progressed, Gandhi intensified his demand for independence, calling for the British to Quit India in a 1942 speech in Mumbai. This was Gandhi's and the Congress Party's most definitive revolt aimed at securing the British exit from India. The British government responded quickly to the Quit India speech, and within hours after Gandhi's speech arrested Gandhi and all the members of the Congress Working Committee. His countrymen retaliated the arrests by damaging or burning down hundreds of government owned railway stations, police stations, and cutting down telegraph wires.

Indian independence movement and Partition of India

Gandhi opposed partition of the Indian subcontinent along religious lines. The Indian National Congress and Gandhi called for the British to Quit India. However, the Muslim League demanded "Divide and Quit India". Gandhi suggested an agreement which required the Congress and the Muslim League to co-operate and attain independence under a provisional government, thereafter, the question of partition could be resolved by a plebiscite in the districts with a Muslim majority. Jinnah rejected Gandhi's proposal and called for Direct Action Day, on 16 August 1946, to press Muslims to publicly gather in cities and support his proposal for partition of Indian subcontinent into a Muslim state and non-Muslim state. The Direct Action Day triggered a mass murder of Calcutta Hindus and the torching of their property, and holidaying police were missing to contain or stop the conflict. The British government did not order its army to move in to contain the violence. The violence on Direct Action Day led to retaliatory violence against Muslims across India. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims were murdered, and tens of thousands were injured in the cycle of violence in the days that followed. Gandhi visited the most riot-prone areas to appeal a stop to the massacres.

Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi

30 January 1948, Gandhi was with his grandnieces in the garden of Birla House (now Gandhi Smriti), on his way to address a prayer meeting, when Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist, fired three bullets from a Beretta M1934 9mm Corto pistol into his chest at point-blank range. According to some accounts, Gandhi died instantly. In other accounts, such as one prepared by an eyewitness journalist, Gandhi was carried into the Birla House, into a bedroom. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the father of the nation, is no more. Perhaps I am wrong to say that; nevertheless, we will not see him again, as we have seen him for these many years, we will not run to him for advice or seek solace from him, and that is a terrible blow, not only for me, but for millions and millions in this country. Gandhi's assassin Godse made no attempt to escape and was seized by the witnesses. He was arrested. In the weeks that followed, his collaborators were arrested as well. Godse was a Hindu nationalist with links to the extremist Hindu Mahasabha. They were tried in court at Delhi's Red Fort. At his trial, Godse did not deny the charges nor express any remorse. Gandhi's death was mourned nationwide. Over a million people joined the five-mile long funeral procession that took over five hours to reach Raj Ghat from Birla house, where he was assassinated, and another million watched the procession pass by. Gandhi's body was transported on a weapons carrier, whose chassis was dismantled overnight to allow a high-floor to be installed so that people could catch a glimpse of his body. The engine of the vehicle was not used; instead four drag-ropes manned by 50 people each pulled the vehicle. Gandhi's assassination dramatically changed the political landscape. Nehru became his political heir. According to Markovits, while Gandhi was alive, Pakistan's declaration that it was a "Muslim state" had led Indian groups to demand that it be declared a "Hindu state". According to Guha, Nehru and his Congress colleagues called on Indians to honour Gandhi's memory and even more his ideals.[196][197] Nehru used the assassination to consolidate the authority of the new Indian state. Gandhi's death helped marshal support for the new government and legitimize the Congress Party's control, leveraged by the massive outpouring of Hindu expressions of grief for a man who had inspired them for decades. The government suppressed the RSS, the Muslim National Guards, and the Khaksars, with some 200,000 arrests.

Conclusion

Gandhi felt it was his responsibility to fight for India's rights. Mahatma Gandhi was important because he led India into freedom from the British. Also, he influenced many people and places other than India. He changed history by protesting non-violently and gaining independence for India. Gandhi is important to us today because he influenced Martin Luther King, so now African-Americans have equal rights. Gandhi was an honorable politician. Many people in the world get inspired and want to be like him. He is seen as a hero who gained India's liberation from Britain and unfair laws. Though some people like Nathuram Godse did not like him and assassinated him, the majority of people loved him as the 'father of nation' and the 'great soul'. Gandhi was a man who was able to fast for his people's freedom and was not afraid to go to jail. He was always ready to sacrifice.

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